

“THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY”: PEYTON RANDOLPH AND THE  
DEFINITION OF LIBERTY IN COLONIAL VIRGINIA

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Peyton Randolph was born in 1721 and served as a pivotal leader in the movement toward independence in Virginia, until his untimely death in 1775. The work attempts to negotiate Randolph's reconciliation of his traditional ideology with his role as a leader in a revolution that addressed social inequality while striving for colonial liberty. As attorney general of Virginia, member and Speaker of the House of Burgesses, and eventually first President of the Continental Congress, Peyton Randolph straddled the divide between elite rule and popular revolution. Politically, Randolph utilized the significant respect he commanded to lead a revolution that combined his reverence for tradition with his capacity to appeal to a variety of social classes; this ability helped to make the Revolution in Virginia both plausible and popular. In social matters, Randolph desired to establish an English society in Virginia, even when that desire ironically brought him into conflict with authorities in London. Over time, as the clash with Great Britain intensified, Randolph began to subjugate his concerns of local hierarchy to the greater cause of American liberty.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Henry Lee to George Washington 22-3 October 1775, in W.W. Abbot ed., *The Papers of George Washington*, 218.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, without whose unwavering support and guidance (and indulgent trips to Williamsburg as a child) this work would have been neither begun nor finished. Thank you both.

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